

## "Footprints"

### Episode #218

#### [Previously ...](#)

*\*Danielle took Sarah out of Brent's room and tried to convince her to give up on Brent, but Sarah would not hear of it and stormed away. Meanwhile, Andy told Claire of his fear that Maggie will not want to be more than friends. Andy and Danielle came face-to-face outside Brent's room.*

*\*Jason took Courtney out for a romantic evening, which began when he led her blindfolded to Windmills for dinner. They resolved to take their Senior pairs skating test together at the end of this upcoming season.*

*\*Paula admitted to Claire that she has been thinking more and more about the son she gave up.*

## KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

The entire situation feels like a dream to Andy. It's a familiar dream, one that has filled his sleeping hours more times than he can count. The setting has never been the hospital, as far as he could tell, but then again, the setting isn't always that distinct. And the setting isn't what counts.

What counts is the one constant: Danielle. She is standing there, not ten feet away from him. Her hair is a little bit lighter now and her skin wears a deeper tan than it used to, but those things make no difference. It's her.

"Danielle," he says in disbelief.

"Andy." The sudden encounter has Danielle just as rattled as it does Andy. She notices the way his eyes have widened, the way his mouth hangs open just a bit, and is sure that she looks very much the same. Of course she knew that coming back to King's Bay might mean running into Andy, but this soon? This easily?

He continues to study her, expecting the image to fade away before his eyes at any moment. "You're here to visit Brent?"

"Yeah." The word comes out very slowly, almost cautiously, as if each and every sound is being lured out and isn't quite sure if it should cave to temptation. "I, uh, I flew in this afternoon. Sarah called to tell me that he woke up and I just--I wanted to be here."

"I'm sure he's thrilled to have you here," Andy says, leaving out the obvious extension. Truthfully, he isn't sure *how* he feels about seeing her here. Part of him is hoping that she will just disappear but another part is trembling with fear at that possibility.

"How have you been?" he manages.

"Good. The tour is over now, so I'm back in San Diego. We're working on putting together a new album." She feels herself slipping into the comfortable groove of standard questions and answers, and she relaxes a little.

"It must be nice to have some downtime."

"Absolutely. The whole pace of being on the road is just exhausting."

She waits for the next question to show her the way through this encounter, but it doesn't come. Andy looks very uncomfortable to her, more uncomfortable than she feels. The initial shock of seeing him, the uncertainty of what feeling there would be between them when they saw one another again, was what was fueling most of her anxiety. Now that is wearing off for her, but the case seems to be different for Andy.

"Andy," she says quickly. She finds herself surprised by the fluidity with which his name comes this time: It is the first thing she's said since they've come face-to-face that hasn't felt forced.

She notices how sharp his reaction is. His gaze stops wandering and he almost freezes, appearing ready to grab onto whatever she has to say next.

She has wanted to say this for so long and, thankfully, it spews itself out with relative ease. "There's something you need to know."

## **GRAYSON BEACH**

A silky breeze carries the evening into the night all through King's Bay, but here along the waterfront the whips of wind are a little sharper and the evening chill a little more biting. Despite having Jason's jacket draped over her shoulders, Courtney cannot suppress a tiny shiver as they stroll along the sandy edge of the town.

The beach is small, tucked away from the piers that fire the waterfront bustle. Rock walls hide the beach and it is only accessible thanks to a set of stairs inserted into one of the walls. Now, with the dark of night hanging overhead, the beach feels even more secluded.

Courtney grasps Jason's hand a little tighter as they come to a pause. The calm water is lapping at the sand and falling just inches short of their feet.

"I should come out here more often," Courtney says. "At night, I mean. It's gorgeous."

"Yeah," Jason agrees, but it comes only after a bump of silence that jars the conversation just as a CD skipping ruins the music.

Court turns to examine him and sees that he is staring out at the water, looking lost in it.

"What's wrong?" she asks.

Jason's stare continues for another static moment before he shakes his head. "Nothing. This was supposed to be a romantic walk, wasn't it?" With a smile that looks a bit forced, he wraps his arms around Courtney.

Her first instinct is to push him away and demand the truth. However, she senses something in his embrace that indicates he needs to hold onto her right now. She snuggles closer to him.

"What is it?" she asks again, more gently.

Again, more hesitation. "It's Tim," Jason says finally. "Looking at the water ... it just made me think. He's out there somewhere, you realize that?"

The subject matter catches her by surprise and she finds it uncomfortable to say anything at all. She knows that her words sound tentative but realizes that it is important to get them out anyway. "Yeah. Maybe ... I mean, we don't know for sure what happened."

"No, I guess not." Jason drops his head a little bit and his nose is buried in Courtney's dark hair, pulled up for the night. He inhales, trying to draw a little bit of her inside of him. "It's so weird that he's gone. It's been months and still, every time I think of it I'm totally thrown for a loop."

His hands are resting on her stomach and she closes hers over them, stroking his fingers lightly as she speaks. "It's not supposed to be easy. I mean, it's a big thing -- it's scary. You loved Tim ... of course it's hard to accept that he's gone."

"Shouldn't it get easier at some point?"

"It should." She stops to contemplate the idea. "It should ... and if you think about it, it has. Remember those first couple of weeks after it happened? You didn't want to open up about it at all. Now here we are, talking about it."

"Yeah, I guess. But he's still gone." The words sound cold and very real out in the cool night air. "He's gone. It's like ... I don't know, this sounds stupid, but it's like a part of

me is gone, too."

"I can understand that. But Jay, you've still got your mom and dad and Molly and Sarah. Your family is still here. It's different, but it's still your family."

"True." The 'but' is hanging off the end, just waiting to drop. "But I lost my only brother, and things will never be the same."

## FISHER HOME

"Is it really you?" Paula's voice sounds hollow in her ears.

"You wouldn't know, would you?"

"I ... I might. I'm trying. But it's been so long ..."

"Whose fault is that, huh?" Angry eyes, so dark, burn right into her. She can feel them searing into her thoughts, taking command of feelings and words she hardly even knew she possessed.

"It wasn't an easy decision," she hears herself plead. It sounds pathetic.

"Oh, well, that makes it *much* better." The sarcasm rolls right off of his tongue and tears at Paula's heart. That pain, that resentment -- it's all because of her.

"Please. Please," she argues feebly.

"Too little, too late, lady!"

"I'm not some lady -- I'm--"

"Don't!" he roars. "Don't say it. I don't want to hear it."

"But--"

"You don't deserve to call yourself that!"

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*You don't deserve ... you don't deserve ...*

The echo rumbles cruelly in her ears as she snaps back to consciousness.

She feels her breath caught in her chest as she jerks to a sitting position. She releases it and tries to get her breathing back to normal. As she lifts a hand, she sees that it is quivering.

*It was just a nightmare,* she whispers mentally.

"Paula?"

The voice startles her, but after the initial shock, the familiarity sinks in and begins to soothe her tattered nerves.

"Honey," Bill says, reaching over. His hand on her shoulder brings a flood of relief. "What's wrong?" he asks.

It takes Paula several seconds to gather herself enough to answer. "Oh -- nothing. Nothing."

But Bill is studying her intently. "You had a nightmare?"

"Oh, um, yes." She rests her head back on the pillow, staring up at the beams of light thrown across the dark ceiling by the moon. "Yes, that's all. It was just a nightmare."

"Paula," Bill says again, his hand still trying to calm her. "Calm down. Breathe. It's all right."

"I'm fine, Bill," she assures him a little too hurriedly. "You don't know--"

"I do know. I know what you were dreaming about."

## **KING'S BAY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL**

Andy waits, mesmerized, for whatever it is Danielle has to say.

"I never really told you this at the time," she begins, obviously torn between wanting to get this out and not knowing how to express it. "Everything happened so fast ... after the wedding, when I went back to San Diego and you followed ..."

The rambling is wearing on Andy's patience. "What are you trying to say?"

"I ... I just want to thank you," she says. "I know how hard that time was for you. You have to believe it was difficult for me, too."

His lips pursed, Andy gives the slightest nod. It comes almost against his wishes: Part of him is still clinging to the belief that Danielle's actions at the end of their relationship were horribly selfish and that she had no regard for how he was hurt.

"You were willing to accept my decision," she continues, "even if it was hard. You didn't try to guilt me into staying with you or cut me down. You knew how important it was for me to pursue my career. I can't thank you enough for giving me that chance, for letting me go out and do what I had to do--what I wanted to do--without making it more difficult for me."

"There wasn't much I could do about it, was there?" Andy shrugs. Danielle isn't sure if it's resignation or sarcasm that she hears tinging the statement.

Andy's next words clear up the confusion for her. "Trying to hang onto you or making the situation worse wasn't going to bring back what I wanted to have between us. It was difficult to let go, but in the long run it would have been harder to be stuck in an unhappy situation."

She breathes a tiny sigh of relief, clutching her hands together in front of her. "I'm glad to hear you say that."

"I'm glad to hear myself say it, too. Danielle, I want to thank you, too."

"For what?"

"For opening up the world to me," he says. "For helping me be my own man. Without you, I might still be stuck in that mansion with my mother!" The thought that the mansion no longer exists flickers across his mind and somewhere inside of him, a deep string of sadness is plucked. He tries to focus elsewhere right now.

Clearly Danielle doesn't know how to respond, but her expression tells Andy that she accepts his gratitude.

"So how are things?" she asks, the curiosity that has been creeping in the back of her head suddenly springing to the fore.

"Good," he answers quickly, as if giving any other answer would be possible. "I'm doing well."

"That's good to hear." A slight hesitation, and then: "How about your mother?"

"Difficult, as usual." They share a momentary acknowledgement of their history with Katherine, like some sort of inside joke. "She's remarried."

"Oh really?"

"Yes ... although if you ask me, it's more of a fiasco than a marriage."

"I'm sorry to hear that. It would be good for her to find some real happiness."

"That's the problem," Andy says. "She's trying to convince everyone, including herself, that she is happy. But this marriage--there are problems."

"That's too bad." Danielle hesitates again but curiosity again gets the better of her. "How are you and she getting along?"

Now it is Andy's turn to be at a loss. "I'm not sure," he confesses. "Things were getting better, but then she agreed to marry this man and it's all gone downhill. I'm trying to convince her that this marriage is not in her best interests, but she's won't listen to me -- or she won't admit that she's listening."

A very genuine grin toys with the corners of Danielle's lips. "You amaze me."

"What?"

"After all your mother put us through, after all she did to you -- you're still willing to patch things up with her and try to help her. That's admirable."

He can't quite agree, but he does say, "I do care about her. She's my mother."

"Well, whether she realizes it or not, she's very lucky to have you as a son."

"Thanks." The temptation to stay and talk with Danielle is strong, but something inside of Andy knows that they have said everything that needs to be said. And a new sense of urgency has come over him.

"Can you do me a favor?"

"Sure," she says, looking a bit surprised.

"Tell Brent that I came by. I, uh, there's something I need to go do."

"All right." Danielle gives a small wave. "It was good to see you."

Andy is already hurrying back to the elevator. "It was good to see you, too."

He steps into the elevator and disappears from sight. Danielle remains in place, her arms folded in front of her. *What was that all about?* she wonders.

## GRAYSON BEACH

"I'm sorry," Courtney says. "I ... I can't even imagine the kind of grief you're feeling. I'm sorry you had to go through losing Tim and that you have to face life without your brother, but ... I don't know, maybe there's a reason for all of this."

When he doesn't respond, she slips out of his hold just enough to turn around and face him. Is he mad?

It quickly becomes evident that he's just thinking. "Maybe," he says finally. "It's not the easiest thing in the world to find an upside to, you know?"

"Of course." She pauses, taking in the sight of him against the rich darkness of the sky. The breeze is playing with his sandy hair and something about the moonlight is making his skin look so soft. But the heartbroken expression on his face is killing her. She only wishes there were actually something she could do to make it go away.

"I miss him," Jason says suddenly, only a little louder than a whisper. "I miss him so much."

"I know." She wraps her arms around him and pulls him tighter, hoping that somehow it will help.

"But maybe you're right. Losing Tim ... it's made me so much more grateful that I had him in my life to begin with. And that I have the people I do have."

"See?" she says, unable to hold off a tiny smile at the sight of his pain beginning to subside.

Now he looks her directly in the eyes. "You know I mean you."

Her smile grows broader. "Yeah, but you've got your mom and dad and sisters, too--"

"Yeah, of course. But you ..." He is suddenly wearing a smile that could rival the one

Courtney has. "You mean so much to me, Court. More than ... God, more than I think I could even try and tell you. I don't know why it took me so many years to realize it, but it's like you--you complete me."

The severity of the declaration stuns Courtney a little, resulting in a sharp intake of breath. But she knows that it's what she has wanted to hear for so long.

"I feel the same way," she says, almost in awe that this is actually coming out of her mouth. "You and I ... You're right, it's like it can't even be described."

The moment lingers and Courtney almost feels the need to flinch or look away or something as Jason's gaze continues to burn so intensely into her own. There is something palpable between them and it's almost scary enough to make her turn away -- almost.

But it's exciting, too, maybe more exciting than anything she has ever felt, and the feeling of his hand closing over hers again sends a surge of electricity through her.

"Let's go," he says.

"What?"

"Final stop of the night," he winks before practically breaking out into a sprint. She follows happily as he leads her by the hand. Sand flies up in their wake as they fly off the beach and out into the night.

## **FISHER HOME**

"What?" Paula's voice resonates with astonishment -- and maybe a touch of fear.

Bill props himself up on the pillow with his elbow. "It was about the kids, wasn't it?" Clearly this is more a statement than a question, despite what the inflection at the end might suggest.

"I know you've been on-edge about all of them," he continues, "especially with all this tension between Molly and Sarah now."

"Yes," Paula admits, sitting up again. She leans against the headboard and uses several fingers to knead her forehead, in a vain attempt to make the nightmare fade from memory.

"Everything will work out, I promise. The girls have always--"

"That's not all, Bill."

Now it is Bill's turn to be taken by surprise. "What do you mean?"

She has to shake off the anxiety before she can say it. It takes several deep breaths, some closing of the eyes, and a lengthy pause. "It was about my son, Bill."

He knows exactly what she means. His initial reaction is difficult to gauge. She expects a blow-up or some muttering but it does not come.

"I'm sorry."

It comes out of nowhere and Paula is shocked. After all these years, after all the discussions -- now?

"I'm sorry you still have to deal with this," Bill says. "I've always known what a significant part of your life it was, but I guess I never wanted to acknowledge that it's something that bothers you. I wanted to believe I was the only one bothered by it, that I was the only one who got hurt."

The surprise is still sinking in. She manages to reach out a hand to touch one of his. "Thank you, Bill."

She lies back down and resumes staring up at the ceiling. Silence is washing back over them, drawing her back into sleep -- and then, suddenly: "Do you wonder what things might have been like if we'd made a different decision?"

Hearing Bill ask the question multiplies Paula's shock from before by ten times. It takes her a moment to gather any sort of response.

"Of course," she says. "If we'd chosen not to give him up, you mean?"

"Yeah. What would this family have been like with five kids? Would we have even had the other four? How would we have dealt with the whole situation? They're strange things to think about."

"They are," she agrees.

Now the silence comes. Once Bill broached the topic of how things might have been, Paula expected a discussion, an analysis of the choice they made and perhaps even a segue into ... No, it doesn't matter. Not now. Bill has ceased the conversation.

She waits for what feels like an eternity for him to speak again, but he doesn't. Eventually she glances over and sees that he has fallen back asleep.

*So close*, she thinks with a stab of anguish.

Try as she might, she knows that is not a possibility for her tonight. Even those few lines of conversation have sent the wheels of her mind into overdrive.

Somewhere amidst all the spinning, she realizes that a decision has been made: She will not be cannot until *it* is done. And it will be done.

## **END OF EPISODE #218**

*What effect did the conversation with Bill have on Paula? What did you think of Andy and Danielle's abrupt reunion, and Jason and Courtney's talk on the beach? Come and visit our Message Forum to make your thoughts heard!*

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